

Spencer Boyer
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs

Closing Remarks
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Renewing the Commitment to Press Freedom in a Changing Media Landscape

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Thank you very much for your kind welcome. I am honored to be with you here today. I first would like to congratulate the organizers of this conference, along with the moderators, speakers, panelists and other participants who have contributed to a successful exchange of ideas on a vital topic.

As a public official responsible for understanding how my government relates to the public in the countries of Europe, I am keenly aware of the role of a free and responsible media as a channel of communication between our societies. I appreciate the effort you all are making toward ensuring the free flow of information within your countries and across national boundaries.

As my boss, Secretary Clinton has said, “When a free media is in jeopardy, all other human rights are also threatened. So in that spirit, let us continue to champion those who stand for media freedom – and expose those who would deny it. And let us always work toward a world where the free flow of information and ideas remains a powerful force for progress.”

I understand that many of you, at least those of you from Macedonia, have seen George Clooney’s film *Good Night, and Good Luck*, the story of American journalist Edward R. Murrow. Ambassador Reeker attended the Macedonian Premiere of the film series last month, and took the occasion to note that the media – in all its forms – are the guardians of the values that we cherish, including free speech and a free and independent press. Those who practice journalism are judged in large respect by their ability to fulfill the mission of holding elected officials accountable through objective and fair reporting.

Now George Clooney didn’t make that film as a mere historical document, he made it because he felt strongly that Murrow’s story was relevant to us in the 21st century. Just as Murrow was fighting to preserve and renew an American tradition of free press and government accountability extending back to the 17th century, our generation must carry the torch passed to us by Murrow and keep it alive for the future. New generations and new media innovations present new challenges for those of us in the media, government, civil society, and other sectors.

As a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs – with a focus on Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs – following the press in Europe is a major part of my job. At this time, we’re all paying very close attention to the phenomenon of social media. Its spread is expanding access to reporting. It’s reshaping the practice and profession of journalism. It’s redefining how people relate to each other, to their governments, and to their sources of information.

The communications revolution has had an impact on the attitudes and aspirations of people everywhere. One needs to look no further than the recent events in northern Africa and the Middle East – and how social media was the key means of communication for protesters. Social media users have played a leading role in the drama unfolding in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Syria. And the internet is serving as a catalyst for journalists and citizens alike to

connect with each other, share their stories, and give voice to ideas for positive change in their societies.

More people have access to more information now than ever before, with technology that empowers people and connects them with communities, networks and markets. Hostile forces, however, have also been able to control access or exploit opportunities to spread disinformation, stoke hatred, or inspire acts of terrorism and destruction.

In Egypt and Tunisia, we saw that social media can be used and manipulated just as easily as government proclamations or information reported in the Press. This makes your mission as professional journalists all the more important – to use the tools of social media ethically and with professional principles – and to report on events fairly and objectively.

As Secretary of State Clinton said earlier this year, “The Internet has become the public space of the 21st century—the world’s town square, its classroom, its marketplace, its coffeehouse and its night club. We all shape and are shaped by what happens there, all two billion of us (on the Internet) and counting.”

This is the new public space in which you are active. It’s crowded and growing more crowded by the day. It’s an environment that is challenging how journalists collect information, disseminate it to consumers, and serve as a channel of communication between citizens and government. Undoubtedly, the arrival of the digital age – the evolution of the Internet, the emergence of new forms of media and the rise of online social networks – has sparked debate as to what it means to be a journalist, what role bloggers play, and what the effect of a blurring of lines between citizen journalists and professionals will be on the media of today and tomorrow. The outcome of that debate will depend in large part on maintaining a commitment to the free expression of ideas. Your role is – depending on your local circumstances – to create, maintain and/or expand the environment where ideas win or lose public favor by their merits, not on the basis of who controls access to information.

This week’s conference celebrates another important event - World Press Freedom Day was observed this week on May 3rd. It was established by the United Nations to celebrate the principles of press freedom and commemorate those who have fought and died trying to exercise them. This year, the United States partnered with UNESCO to host the global commemoration of World Press Freedom Day in Washington, D.C.

This year’s theme for the commemoration could not have been more timely: “21st Century Media — New Media, New Barriers.” The establishment and fostering of an independent, pluralistic, and free press is essential to the development of civil societies and democracies across the globe.

Around the world, as people reflect World Press Freedom Day and renew their commitment to the free flow of information, we hope that this part of the world can become a source of positive examples. That is not always the case, of course, but this week’s conference shows the way to new possibilities. Just as new media pose difficult questions, they also give us the tools to engage with each other and overcome challenges.

Thank you for your attention, your participation at this conference, and for your commitment to your brave and honorable profession. I urge you to continue to strive for excellence in your craft – in the traditional press and with social media – with every word you write and in everything that you report. This applies to the immediate demand for fair and accurate information on Macedonia’s upcoming elections, but also to your reporting and analysis of developments in the region and around the world. Your fellow citizens deserve no less. Thank you.